

MALAWI: AN OVERVIEW OF CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS - 2009

1. Politics:

- Malawi gained independence on the 6th of July 1964, and Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda became the country's first President. Dr. Banda, within the Malawian Congress Party, dominated political life of the country until 1994, when he organized general election on the basis of a democratic framework.
- Dr. Banda was defeated on the election by Dr. Bakili Muluzi from the United Democratic Front (UDF) and in effect ending a long period of one party state. Dr. Muluzi two terms in office were also not without serious controversy, while the government needed to cope with a variety of development matters including the organization of democratic elections.
- The Head of State is currently President Dr. Bingu wa Mutharika. He was elected on 20th May 2004. In 2005 a power struggle between the President and his predecessor former President Dr. Muluzi, led to President Mutharika resignation from the UDF to form a new party, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP).
- Malawian politics have been very dynamic since the introduction of the multi party system. Other political parties in addition to the UDF and DPP include:-
 - Alliance for Democracy
 - Malawi Congress Party
 - Malawi Democratic Party
 - Malawi Forum for Unity and Development
 - Movement for Genuine Democratic Change
 - National Unity Party
 - Peoples Progress Movement
 - Peoples Transformation Party
- The dynamics of Malawian politics led to some turbulent times. Perhaps one issue that is currently creating controversy in Parliament is the UDF members of parliament crossing carpet to

join the DPP. In fact, the UDF is currently arguing that MPs who 'cross the carpet' in accordance of Section 65 of the constitution, should have their seats declared vacant. It will also be noted the differences between the President continue to represent a drag in the political process. The Vice President is not functional while under house arrest in the context of charges of alleged plot to assassinate the President. Moreover, the refusal to pass this year's budget by the Opposition in Parliament could complicate development process if not promptly resolved.

2. **Economy:**

- The economy functions on a free market bases with fairly little government intervention. The country's major economic sector is agriculture.
- With no availability of unemployment data, unemployment can be regarded high in Malawi and it is estimated that a large number of the population lives below the poverty line.
- Most Malawians depend on farming, but the sector can be unstable and under pressure because of drought, heavy rainfalls and rapid population growth that accordingly, there may be need for food aid every year.
- Malawian government is trying to promote economic development through the encouragement of foreign investments. The Shire-Zambezi waterway project is considered as an important step to strengthening the economy of Malawi, as it would lead to increase in trade and revival of agriculture, tourism, mining and social services. In addition, the project will establish a new inter-modal transport network that will combine water, rail and road systems to significantly reduce cost of import and exports.
- The international community is trying to help Malawi develop its economy. The EU Commission in July 2006 awarded Malawi €1.6 Million to help build capacity for effective negotiation of a new trade and economic pact with Europe. This is aimed at

strengthening Malawi National Development and Trade Forum (NDTF) in the ongoing negotiations of Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs)

- Additionally, in July 2006 former United States President Bill Clinton and Sir Thom Hunter of Britain, signed initiative agreement between the Malawian government and the Clinton/Hunter Foundation. The agreement was aimed at supporting social, economic development in Malawi. Indeed, it will help expand the Malawian government initiatives on education, health care, HIV/AIDS, clean water sanitation, and integration of rural development.

3. **Corruption:**

- Corruption is very high in the country, but the situation is improving when compared to the situation in previous regimes.
- Although corruption charges have been brought against the former President Dr. Bakili Muluzi, nevertheless, these were subsequently dropped at the directives of the Director of Public Prosecution.
- To a large extend, the new anti-corruption agenda that President Mutharika is pursuing is restoring the international donor's confidence to assist and develop initiatives in Malawi.

4. **Health:**

- The country has a high rate incidence of HIV/AIDS. A large number of Malawians die of this pandemic every year. Following years of silence, the authorities spoke out about the crisis and since 2004 the government has taken major actions to deal with the pandemic.

5. **Conclusion:**

- Many of the political limitations of the Banda years ended with a new political era in Malawi. However, the issues of corruption, poverty and the high rate of HIV/AIDS infection represent critical impediment to development.

- It is believed that President Mutharika's economic agenda would improve to some extent development in Malawi, since it has gained the support of the international financial institutions. However, the disputes within Malawian politics, if not contained, could switch the government attention from the important issues such as unemployment and HIV/AIDS.
- There is a pressing need to resolve constitutional issues, encourage greater democratization, tackle increasing unemployment and reduce poverty.

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